

### 3. EU Enlargement to the Western Balkans from the Polish Perspective

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#### 3.1. An Overview of the Polish Discourse on Further EU Enlargement

##### 3.1.1. Public Opinion

The Poles lead European rankings of support for expanding the EU. Both in Eurobarometer 63 (May-June 2005) and 64 (October-November 2005) the Poles were second only to the Slovenes in general enthusiasm for the idea of enlargement, with 76 and 72% of the respondents supporting inclusion of all applicants or selected states.<sup>1</sup> According to Eurobarometer 65, 78% of the Polish respondents assented to the statement that the enlargement strengthens the EU, while only 11% believed the opposite. This level of support places the Polish society among the top enthusiasts: compared to 67% Czechs in favour (with 25% of an opposed view) and 62% Latvians (and 26% in opposition).<sup>2</sup>

A significant share of the Polish public is willing to see the EU extended without reservations. National polls conducted in 2004-2005 indicate that the support for an unqualified position is consolidating. While in November 2004, 20% subscribed to the view that the EU ought to expand to 'all states willing to accede' in the near future, in July 2005 that share rose to 30%. Although the percentage of the definite opponents increased from 12% to 18% in that period, the largest flow could be observed away from the middle position that in November 2004 enjoyed the support of 50% of all respondents (and which was down to 36% seven months later) – that of the integration of only selected states.<sup>3</sup>

However, a Eurobarometer poll conducted in 2006 shows that the majority of Poles (64%) are uninterested in the events taking place in the EU's neighbourhood taken as a whole. This relative lack of interest is shared by the respondents in other Central and East European new Member States (including Latvia and the Czech Republic). As it will be shown below, the interest varies greatly when different states are considered: the term 'neighbourhood' is commonly used to refer to the eastern flank of the Union.

Support for further expansion of the EU has been generally high since the first national polls on the topic were carried out in 2002 and continued to rise after accession. The share of supporters of integrating other East European countries reached 68% in December 2002 and 70% in January 2003, and respectively 49% and 51% were in favour of Turkey's entry.<sup>4</sup> By November 2004, a strong majority of respondents expressed support for the accession of the following countries: Ukraine (74%), Turkey (68%), Croatia (78%) and Serbia and

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<sup>1</sup> See: [http://europa.eu.int/comm/public\\_opinion/archives/eb/eb63/eb63\\_en.pdf](http://europa.eu.int/comm/public_opinion/archives/eb/eb63/eb63_en.pdf);  
[http://europa.eu.int/comm/public\\_opinion/archives/eb/eb64/eb64\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu.int/comm/public_opinion/archives/eb/eb64/eb64_en.htm)

<sup>2</sup> QD8.2 of Eurobarometer 65.2 (255).

<sup>3</sup> Polls were conducted by the CBOS and included in the report No. 155/2005, "Opinions on the Functioning of the European Union", Warsaw, September 2005. [http://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2005/K\\_155\\_05.PDF](http://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2005/K_155_05.PDF)

<sup>4</sup> Surveys were administered by the Warsaw-based Centre for Social Opinion Research (CBOS). See <http://www.cbos.pl>

Montenegro (74%). Lower levels of support were shown for Russia (54%), Morocco (50%) and Israel (43%).<sup>5</sup>

The enthusiasm for further enlargement, especially to include the eastern neighbours, characterised Poland as a candidate country and continued in the first months after accession to mark the peak at the time of Orange Revolution in late 2004. However, the support dissipated somewhat between the spring and autumn of 2005 (Table 1). In the unfavourable circumstances of a perceived internal crisis in the EU and the absence of positive signs from the EU institutions and other major states, a decline was observed in support for both the eastern and southern direction of enlargement. One variable that certainly played a part in dampening the readiness to enlarge the EU was the recognition of a crisis within the EU spurred by the negative votes of the Dutch and the French during the constitutional referenda. Thus, although the Poles remain among the champions of the enlargement, they have also become more aware of the need to acknowledge the concerns of other Europeans about this process. Moreover, the decline could be attributed to the realisation that the optimism about the possibilities to realise this agenda, for instance in relation to Ukraine, had been unrealistic.

**Table 1. Decline in Polish Support for Enlargement in 2005**

<i>Support for enlargement to:</i>	March 2005		November 2005	
	<i>For</i>	<i>Against</i>	<i>For</i>	<i>Against</i>
Morocco	42	33	35 (- 7)	35 (+ 2)
Russia	46	39	34 (- 12)	45 (+ 6)
Turkey	55	28	44 (- 11)	33 (+ 5)
Ukraine	77	12	64 (- 13)	18 (+ 6)

*Source: TNS Sofres, [http://www.yes-ukraine.org/en/survey/november.html]*

At the same time it is worth noting that two key arguments for drawing the lines of enlarging the EU that reappeared in the discourse across Europe have not carried much weight in the Polish public since the country's own accession. The criteria for integration that could potentially exclude some of the candidates are mentioned by a minority of the respondents. When in November 2004 the question was posed as to the conditions to be met by the candidate states, the membership in the 'Christian cultural milieu' and the location within the geographical boundaries of Europe were cited by 11% and 10% respectively. A stable democratic system was considered essential by a far larger share of the respondents (30%). The majority named two criteria that focused on the state of the political and economic systems of the applicants: a stable market economy was mentioned by over two-thirds (68%) followed by the rule of law and respect for human rights.<sup>6</sup>

### *3.1.2. Official Position and Public Debate*

<sup>5</sup> Results obtained from surveys conducted among the citizens of large EU states (TNS Sofres).

<sup>6</sup> CBOS No. 187/2004, "Opinions on Further Enlargement of the European Union", Warsaw, December 2004, [http://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2004/K\_187\_04.PDF]

An analysis of the official statements of the presidential and the prime minister's office as well as interviews with members of the national and European parliament reveal the existence of a broad consensus. EU enlargement is generally in Poland's interest; therefore Poland will not block further enlargement. However, given the country's limited clout within the EU for realising its agenda, all efforts need to be deployed for stabilising Poland's eastern neighbourhood (Belarus and Ukraine) by anchoring them in the Euro-Atlantic institutions (NATO and the EU). As a tactical choice, Poland will not play a leading role as the advocate of any Southeast European country to the same level that it has vowed to pull its weight behind the aspirations of Ukraine.

The eastern dimension clearly takes precedence over the southern or southeastern vector in the activities of both Polish diplomacy and in the interests of both the domestic and European parliamentarians. In contrast to the vocal support to the cause of Ukraine in the EU, the Polish government chose to take a similar position as other EU states, approving the decision to close negotiations with Bulgaria and Romania and open talks with Croatia and Macedonia, but it did not express any signs of strong enthusiasm. Moreover, as opposed to the EU integration of Ukraine, where Poland has proven to be a major driving force within the EU, neither the membership of Romania and Bulgaria nor the prospects of further expansion of the Union in the Western Balkans (Croatia, Macedonia) evoked any debate or explicit formulation of the national position. The relative low priority accorded to the issue of the accession of countries of Southeastern Europe or Turkey in the national public could be seen by its absence in the programmes of the parties for national elections and only veiled references to the question of further enlargement in the campaigns for the European Parliament. There were virtually no public consultations on the issue and the government did not run a campaign to communicate either its position or grounds for it.

This contrast stems from the unequal weight that Poland has placed on its foreign policies to the eastern and southern vectors. The question of leaving EU membership open to Belarus and Ukraine was implicit in Poland's efforts to avoid drawing new divides in Eastern Europe that could occur if the country's eastern border would be a permanent frontier of the Union. Through its diplomatic activities dating back to the early 1990s, Poland has been a committed and vocal proponent of raising the profile of its eastern neighbours (Belarus and Ukraine) vis-à-vis the Euroatlantic institutions, in particular the EU. The Foreign Ministry's proposal for institutionalising an 'eastern dimension' in the Union's foreign policy foreshadowed to some extent the European Neighbourhood Policy. The Orange Revolution was the occasion for the Polish politicians and the public to demonstrate their commitment to the activist policy aiming at democratisation and opening Euro-Atlantic prospects to Ukraine.

In comparison with the long-standing preoccupation with the eastern direction of its national policy, the southeastern vector has been accorded far less prominence. The main argument raised to justify Poland's official support for further EU enlargement in Southeastern Europe has been the reference made to the principle of adhering to agreements and promises made beforehand (*pacta sunt servanda*). Former President Aleksander Kwaśniewski pointed to the commitments that the European Union undertook as regards both the candidate states (Romania, Bulgaria, Croatia and Turkey) and the successor states of the former Yugoslavia that were given the prospects of gradual integration. His successor, Lech Kaczyński, echoed these sentiments on a number of occasions.

This argument is based on the conviction that 'it is not appropriate' that Poland and other new Member States that just acceded should deny accession to other states. The official position stresses on the one hand that the EU side ought to guarantee a 'fair starting point' and should be willing to present each candidate state with prospects of eventually becoming a member. On the other hand, it is hinted that the speed and outcome of the negotiations depends largely on the candidates' state of preparations and their will to introduce the required reforms.

The IPA's research in 2005 revealed that the Polish politicians and analysts do not relate the issue of accession of new candidates from Southeastern Europe to Poland's interests, but rather to its impact on the direction of the European integration. The fact that the potential costs to Poland were not contemplated at this point could be related to the commonly shared belief that the enlargement would not involve a negative monetary impact for Poland as a sure net beneficiary of EU funds for the period of the next two financial perspectives. Some respondents stressed, however, that they expected the issue of financial implications to be a more likely component of the debate towards the end of the negotiations when the details of the offer for future Member States would be known. At the same time, the proponents of continued enlargement were looking forward to receiving support from prospective new Member States in votes at the European Council and the Parliament. However, they note that they count more on the solidarity from the new members than on a genuine convergence of actual interests.

The issue of EU accession of the two eastern neighbours (Belarus and Ukraine), however, is accorded much higher priority as it is related to the geopolitical concerns of Poland. For these reasons, the Polish officials (including consecutive governments and presidents) came to a national consensus on the objectives of the policy towards the two eastern neighbours, which came to be known as Poland's eastern policy. As the country proceeded towards EU membership, the national agenda was reformulated to match the change in the instruments of Polish foreign policy upon the country's accession to the Union. Opening the 'European perspective' for those states was thus considered to be an incentive and eventually an anchor for economic and political reforms. As such it has been regarded by all the major political groups as an issue that is central to national security, which is then extended to the realm of regional geopolitics, influenced by the unceasing concern with the spectre of Russia's influence in the area. Rapprochement between the enlarged EU and Ukraine and Belarus is thus seen not only as a solution to Warsaw's lingering preoccupation with its own geopolitical position vis-à-vis Moscow, but also as an ultimate solution to the security dilemma of the countries in between the EU and Russia.

Poland's activism in the policy of 'drawing' Belarus and Ukraine to Europe is also frequently justified by the historical heritage of a common statehood with Belarus and Ukraine. The Polish eastern policy is based on the so-called Giedroyć doctrine, developed in the émigré circles in the 1950s. The geopolitical vision was laid down in the Paris-based *Kultura* journal and included three main lines of thought. Firstly, it precluded any of Poland's territorial claims on its eastern neighbours. Secondly, it called for the recognition of their independence. Thirdly, it postulated the end of the possible Russo-Polish rivalry for influence over Belarus or Ukraine.

Although the geopolitical concerns underlie the agenda in Poland's relations with Russia and by proxy with the current Belarusian regime, the country has developed a full-scope national neighbourhood policy going far beyond security considerations. The territories adjacent to Poland's eastern borders have been the object of activities aiming at promoting democracy

and human rights, economic transformation, state apparatus reforms and third sector development. The priority of the region of Eastern Europe is apparent in Poland's official democratisation efforts and development aid as well as in the traditional focus of non-governmental actors on seeking partnerships in the direct eastern neighbourhood.

### **3.2. The Polish Position on the EU Accession of Western Balkan States**

#### *3.2.1. The Place of the Region in the General Polish Support for Enlargement*

Poles display significant support to enlarging the EU in all directions. According to both the Eurobarometer and TNS Sofres polls the majority of Poles would include both the countries of the Western Balkans (such as Croatia or Serbia and Montenegro), the CIS (with Ukraine in the first place) and the Mediterranean (in particular Turkey). Although less than the absolute majority would see EU membership extended to Israel, Morocco or Russia, the figures, which exceed 40%, are still much higher than those found for supporters of those three states elsewhere in the EU.

The Eurobarometer results<sup>7</sup> show that, in agreement with the polls taken in other states, the opposition has been the lowest towards the three states with a higher GDP than the EU average (Iceland, Norway and Switzerland), and fewer than 20% of the respondents expressed strong reservations about the likelihood of accession of the three Slavic states (Bulgaria, Croatia or Ukraine). As in other states, Albania and Turkey are listed at the bottom of the rankings. Significantly, the sequence does not follow the state of official talks with various candidates as neither of the top choices has expressed interest in EU accession and the support for Ukraine, which is not even a candidate, is much higher than that for Turkey.

The Poles, like the citizens of other new Member States, are most interested in the countries that are either wealthier or evoke positive associations on other grounds (for instance, a shared historical experience). The rankings reflect the preoccupation of the Polish public and elite with the area that for centuries formed a single state and where the Polish language and culture were present: the western CIS, covering Belarus and Ukraine, and to a smaller extent European part of Russia. In that context, Southeastern Europe may understandably be featured far less prominently as an area outside of the historical zone of interest.

On the other hand, the potential factors fuelling negative attitudes towards the integration of Southeast European states are generally absent, too. The wartime associations of the Balkans with interethnic conflicts, weak, unstable states and general insecurity have given way to the positive images of tourist destinations on the Adriatic and the Black Sea, investment opportunities and to the rediscovery of cultural heritage. The economic recovery of many of the post-Yugoslav states has particularly appealed to the Polish observers who were frequent visitors to the relatively affluent and West-oriented Yugoslavia in the 1980s and later watched with dismay the dramatic disintegration of the once successful economy and multiethnic society. Such a spectacular upturn is appreciated by the Poles who themselves had a turbulent history and for whom European integration was an important anchor of security and an opportunity for consolidating the economic and political transition from autarchy and authoritarianism to a liberal market economy and pluralist democracy.

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<sup>7</sup> Based on Eurobarometer No. 63, 64 and 65 of May-June 2005, November 2005 and June 2006.

The accession of these states appeals also to the Polish public on more emotional level. Unlike in the case of relations with Russia, the appreciation of common Slavic roots is not tinged by a history of political conflict. Moreover, the fact that Yugoslavia represented a form of a Western-oriented, relatively liberal version of the socialist system with elements of the market (including virtually non-collectivised agriculture) made it into a model for the generations of Poles in the period of Communism. The area was a tourist and commercial destination for the Poles already in the 1980s, and the personal experience solidified the images of hospitality, informality and ‘kindred spirit’. The experience of granting temporary asylum to the victims of the conflicts in Bosnia and Kosovo was accompanied by general sentiments of empathy especially since the hostilities were recognised as major humanitarian tragedies.

Against the background of the virtual absence of references to the individual states in the Polish national debate, the position of the European Commission differentiating the states is of growing importance. Considering that Poland does not play a role of major advocate of any of the states of the region within the EU, the Commission’s assessments are generally accepted as accurate. Particular attention is paid in the official statements and few media reports that are released on the issue of the co-operation of the governments of the states of the region with the international bodies dealing with the prosecution of crimes against humanity in the former Yugoslavia. It is noteworthy that the Polish Foreign Ministry officials on several occasions have singled out the record of collaboration as a key indicator of the countries’ commitment to the EU course.

### *3.2.2. Level of Support for Different Western Balkan Countries*

The ranking of support for the accession of countries in Southeastern Europe remains stable among the Polish respondents and corresponds to that of the EU-25. Croatia is consistently the country with top support (70%), followed by Macedonia (63%), Bosnia and Herzegovina (61%), Serbia and Montenegro (60%), Albania (59%) and Turkey (51%).<sup>8</sup>

**Table 2. Support Levels for the Accession of Countries of Southeastern Europe**

	Date	Croatia	Macedonia	Bosnia & H.	Serbia & M.	Albania	Turkey
EB 65.2	04/2006	70	63	61	60	59	51
EB 64.2	11/2005	70	57	55	55	48	42
EB 63.4	06/2005	74	63	62	61	56	54

*Source: Eurobarometer*

Only a small minority (4%) of the Polish respondents believed that the accession of Western Balkan countries would be primarily in the interest of their own state—which is around the average for the EU-25. However, fewer respondents in Poland than in the EU-25 asserted that the accession would be mainly in the interest of the acceding states (38% compared to 45%), while relatively more believed that the accession was in the common interest of the EU and Western Balkan states (31% compared to 23%) or primarily in the interest of the EU (13% compared to 9%).

<sup>8</sup> QD16 of Eurobarometer 65.2 (255)

Virtually no coverage of the issue of EU enlargement to the Southeast in the Polish press indicates that the support levels may be unrelated to the state of bilateral relations or the awareness of the merits of the applicants from that region. Although the respondents do not claim to attribute much significance to the questions of culture or geography, personal experiences and judgments based on the perceived distance play a role. While the support levels remain far above those found in many other EU states, a similar pattern prevails in which the highest support is reserved for states that are perceived as clearly belonging to Europe in a geographic as well as the cultural sense.

However, the absence of the debate on the desirability of EU membership for either the eastern neighbours or states of Southeastern Europe that enjoy the highest support (Croatia or Macedonia) is striking. This silence confirms the issues of geography and religion are not among the terms that would be explicitly central to the debate on further enlargement to the East European region. This may reflect the perception that the states of the region are unquestionably within the geographical boundaries of Europe and their shared Slavic and Christian identities are acknowledged. However, some correlation between the cultural distance and the weakening support for EU accession could be noted in the cases of Albania and Turkey, which are consistently at the bottom of the rankings. Recent trends indicate a convergence of support for most Western Balkan states at around 60% (with the exception of Croatia at 70%), while the Turkish candidacy has seen a slippage with only slightly more than a half in support.

### **3.3. Conclusions**

Several Western Balkan states have expressed hope that Poland would be among the champions of this enlargement. Are these expectations realistic? There are some reasons warranting optimism in this regard. Firstly, Poland is vitally interested in keeping the overall momentum of enlargement and the progress in accession negotiations of any candidate demonstrates the viability of the process as a whole. Secondly, given the difficult 'climate' for enlargement in the EU, the candidacies of the smaller Balkan states are seen as relatively easier to accept than that of Ukraine or Turkey, so the success of these countries may be viewed as a way out of the recent deadlock over the entire issue. Finally, since the Balkan candidates are post-Communist European states, their accession is regarded (as was the inclusion of Bulgaria and Romania) to be a continuation of the process of bridging of Cold-War divides that represented the primary rationale for the overall EU eastern enlargement.

There are also some signs of the growing significance of the region for Polish diplomacy. The measures that were recently adopted are symbolic: such was the decision to use the form the Republic of Macedonia in bilateral relations with Skopje; others are practical: Warsaw waived visa fees for the nationals of some Balkan states, paralleling the move adopted for the citizens of Ukraine and Moldova. The region is becoming an increasingly important area for the Polish development aid, reflecting the preoccupation with stabilizing the once war-torn areas and advancing the transition to liberal democracy and market economy through the recourse to own experience of transformation.

However, Poland is likely to remain in the second line of supporters of the accession of this group of countries. There are some reasons for the low-key position of Warsaw. Firstly, Poland has not identified vital national interests in the area going beyond the general support for continuing enlargement and the wish to stabilise the EU's neighbourhood. Secondly, no

single country has been selected as a 'strategic partner' along the lines adopted towards Ukraine (Croatia's candidacy has been warmly welcomed; however, Poland has not taken a leading position on this candidacy, either). Finally, the current government and president stress the need to focus on a few priority issues as part of Poland's activism in the EU.

Nonetheless, another process is likely to take place. Just as it happened with Bulgaria and Romania, their accession increased the Polish interest in increasing bilateral relations. The Balkan candidates and would-be members will be prized by the Polish government as potential allies within the Union, representing the once minority view of the more market-oriented and Euroatlantic course for Europe. The anchoring of the states in the EU norms is likely to have an appealing effect on the level of commercial exchange and investment for the Polish businesses.

Clearly, the ultimate objective for Polish diplomacy is extending the EU eastwards to include Belarus and Ukraine. However, the accession of southeast European states is not seen as a detour or alternative to reaching that goal. In the current 'cold climate' for enlargement in general, the continuation of the process is particularly welcome as a signal of the fundamental commitment to accept the qualified members. Although Poland will not be among the key champions of this direction of enlargement, it will certainly cheer the progress on that front, too.